

Test of a Summit

Can Leaders Cling to the Right Track When Their Aims Remain at Odds?

By R. W. APPLE Jr.

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 1 — President Bush and President Mikhail S. Gorbachev of the Soviet Union have done much better at their second summit conference on the agenda from the past than on the agenda for the future. They have done better on the issues that constitute the legacy of the cold war than on the issues thrown up by its demise.

News
Analysis

With two days of formal negotiations complete and a Saturday of informal conversations at Camp David still to come, it is not entirely clear if this meeting has met the test for success that was suggested beforehand by Aleksandr A. Bessmertnykh, the new Soviet Ambassador to Washington: Are the leaders "sincerely convinced that relations are on the right track"?

The two men talk to each other "sometimes bluntly but never belligerently," a participant in the meetings said, and they "respect each other's perspectives." But except in the most basic sense of wishing to avoid war, their goals for the years ahead have not yet meshed. Another participant added, "So far, on the issues that really drive the relationship, they have not fully engaged."

'Toward a New World'

To use a bit of political patois made famous by the former Speaker of the House, Thomas P. O'Neill, what has been achieved "ain't beanbag": a landmark treaty on chemical weapons; lesser accords on topics like nuclear testing and grain and the environment and cultural exchanges, and an agreement outlining a strategic arms treaty, which came only after eight grinding years of bargaining and a last-minute hitch that for several hours threatened to delay the whole thing.

"We are making steps toward a new world," Mr. Gorbachev said at tonight's gala signing ceremony. "The area of disagreement is being narrowed."

The strategic arms treaty will be the first ever to require the destruction of any of the weapons that the United States and the Soviet Union have been using for decades to threaten each other with nuclear annihilation. The reductions in the strike forces will amount to about a third, not a half, as originally envisaged. The terms have upset many American conservatives, and some points had to be deferred.

Old questions related to new ones have proved more nettlesome: a trade agreement to which both sides committed themselves 18 years ago remains entangled in the crisis in Lithuania, even though Mr. Gorbachev got the economic trophy that he had lobbied for, and progress in the negotiations on conventional forces in Europe was limited by the issue that undergirds almost all diplomacy these days — the military posture of a unified Germany.

Filled With Political Peril

The nationalities question, as epitomized by but not limited to Lithuania and the other Baltic republics, is filled with political peril for Mr. Bush and Mr. Gorbachev.

Still, the package of documents signed by the two presidents late this afternoon represents a body of accomplishment that is unsurpassed in Soviet-American relations since the days of détente almost 20 years ago.

But so far at least, Mr. Bush and Mr. Gorbachev have found it much harder to set out a course for the new Europe, with clearly understood, mutually acceptable roles for the United States, the Soviet Union and a unified Germany, than to undo some of the grosser military excesses of the recent past.

If Dean Acheson was "Present at the Creation" of a new world order almost a half-century ago, as the title of his memoirs asserted, Mr. Bush and Mr. Gorbachev have been chosen by history to be present at the re-creation.

But they have not reached real agreement on what sort of a world they want to see, and even if they did so, neither has the authority any longer to impose his vision on the rest of the world.

Seeking to Preserve Power

Mr. Gorbachev came to Washington seeking to preserve his power and that of his country, apprehensive like every Russian leader from Peter the Great to Nikita S. Khrushchev about whether foreigners would treat his country with sufficient dignity. His wife thanked the audience at the Library of Congress on Thursday for according respect to Soviet art, and Mr. Gorbachev told a Congressional delegation that "it would be humiliating if we were to ask, to beg for something from you."

He and Mr. Bush both have a vested interest in stability; incumbents always do. But the real question before them was not, as Mr. Gorbachev framed it, "Does the United States want a Soviet Union which is weak, torn by complexes and problems and turmoil, or do you want a dynamic Soviet state that is open to the outside world?" It was: "How do we get there? Who yields what?"

Like Charles de Gaulle in World War

Talking bluntly, not belligerently, and respecting each other.

II, Mr. Gorbachev has transformed his weakness into strength at the bargaining table, implicitly warning Mr. Bush that a successor might be less to American liking. But the efficacy of that tactic has been reduced by the emergence of Boris N. Yeltsin, the new President of the Russian republic, as a formidable rival. It now seems to many American policy makers that Mr. Yeltsin is as credible an alternative, après Gorbachev, as the deluge of neo-Stalinism.

Forcing the Pace

Mr. Gorbachev, tired as he is, has worked furiously, appealing to every constituency he can think of, from actors to senators to pedestrians to the television networks, in addition to Mr. Bush.

He has forced the pace. When he said at the White House on Thursday evening that new ideas had been put forward on Germany, surprised Administration officials from the President on down had to scramble to match him, with the result that they contradicted one another.

For his efforts, he appears to have achieved at least one important goal beyond the formal agreements: he has driven home to many American officials, one of them said, the intensity of his country's apprehension about Germany. That has made it more likely that the West will eventually go further to reassure him, through more radical changes in the shape of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or indirect limits on the size of the German army or a greater role for the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, if not all three, in exchange for his acquiescence to German membership in NATO.

Although the Soviet Union is in trouble, and the United States and Western Europe are not — although "we won and they lost," in the political shorthand of American conservatives — there seems no disposition in Washington to "impose a solution on us," as a senior Russian negotiator put it.

Mr. Bush, in the words of a Western European Ambassador here, "has kept Gorbachev engaged in the search" for a new European architecture.